

# Kashmir: Self-determination, Communalism and Democratic Rights

K Balagopal

*About 25,000 people, by official count, have been killed in Kashmir in the last six years, about two-thirds of them by the Indian armed forces. Kashmiris put the number at 50,000. Yet democratic public opinion in India has remained largely silent, except for occasionally expressing disapproval of army atrocities. Is only killing people in a staged crossfire a human rights violation? Is the denial of the right of self-determination itself not act of human rights violation?*

Now that cynical realism believes it has won some sort of a victory in Kashmir, it is time to talk of some principles — principles pertaining not only to the way the rulers of India have been dealing with Kashmir, but also the way progressive and democratic-minded Indians have been responding to Kashmir, and to the problems stemming from the mode of expression of the cause of Kashmiri *self-determination*. Criticism of the rulers is easy and uncomplicated, at least in principle, if one has no material or ideological interests vested in the matter. The others are less easy, less familiar and less comfortable, but unless we learn to formulate such critiques, the cause of progress and democracy will remain stuck at 1989.

India has quite a sizeable section of intellectuals, activists and political movements committed to the democratic cause. 'Democracy', of course, is not an uncomplicated expression, and if the *bourgeois* version of it is full of problems, then so is the leftist version of it. Indian democrats, movements and activists, for instance, have reacted strongly to quite a few instances of suppression of the democratic aspirations of different sections of the people, as a matter of democratic principle; but they have remained brutally silent — or else exhibited a low-key response — about others. One need not add that there are a few honourable exceptions. The silence is not due to oversight or preoccupation with more urgent matters. That may be excused. The silence, on the contrary, is studied and deliberate. It is quite frequently even theorised.

A close analysis of the reasons proffered for the lack of equal enthusiasm to speak up in each of these cases would reveal a lot of unsuspected problems with what is commonly understood as the democratic worldview by those who believe their understanding is untrammelled by *bourgeois* or other limitations.

## DOUBLE STANDARDS

Kashmir is one example. About 25,000 people have been killed in Kashmir in the last six years — by official count — about two-thirds of them by the Indian armed forces. Kashmiris put the number at 50,000. Western human rights organisations and some Indian civil rights groups have documented army atrocities on the Kashmiris in considerable detail. Kashmiris, for their part, have not only documented their suffering but also argued over and over again their case for the exercise of the right of *self-determination*. Their arguments are difficult to refute except by resorting to cynical political ‘realism’, which can be given progressive padding by referring to the US machinations in the South Asia. Yet, the democratic public opinion of India has remained largely silent except to occasionally express disapproval of army atrocities. Kashmiris tirelessly ask every human rights activist they meet whether only getting killed in a staged cross-fire is a human rights violation, and whether the denial of the right of *self-determination* is not in itself an act of human rights violation. The response from much of ‘democratic’ public opinion in India is a stony silence.

A prominent leftist intellectual, writing in the columns of this journal, has cautioned those who would defend *self-determination* in Kashmir to realise that what they are defending is *religious self-determination*. Others, equally well known for their progressive views, have said that the option of plebiscite cannot be allowed to the Kashmiris because it is likely to be exercised communally. In other words, they will be allowed to choose only if they are not going to choose Pakistan, which choice, if made, is axiomatically believed to be on religious or communal (and it is not clear whether the two are the same) grounds. Nobody has as yet said that elections must no longer be held in Maharashtra because the electorate is exhibiting a tendency to make the communal choice of voting for the BJP and Shiv Sena, but the same argument is believed to be valid in the case of Kashmir. If someone wishes to argue that there is a difference between a choice made within the Indian state and the choice of seceding from the Indian state, then one would like to hear some argument that would show that the double standards are justified by this difference.

Is Kashmiri *self-determination* a religious aspiration? Is it the case that it is necessarily classifiable as either religious or secular? Is all that is religious necessarily

communal? Is a religious aspiration to be denied even if it is not communal? Assuming that it is communal, is all that is communal necessarily to be banned in order to get rid of it? How far is the idea that the freedom to choose ought to be and can be denied in order to prevent harmful choices valid? It has a certain validity in the case of physically harmful things such as drugs, but how far can one take it in the realm of ideas and identities without making nonsense of the notion of democracy? In general, is the potential for evil human beings best exorcised — or at all exorcised — by depriving them of their right to make free choices? What, anyway, is the source of evil — such as, for instance, communal divisiveness — in human beings, and how are we to ever overcome it?

A comprehensive discussion of these questions is necessary if democratic public opinion in India is ever to complete a *self-critical* examination of its attitude towards the 'Kashmir problem', and the dubious doctrinal certitudes that underlie it. What can be attempted here is only a preliminary discussion of it.

## IS KASHMIRI IDENTITY RELIGIOUS?

What exactly the Kashmiris mean by '*azaadi*'<sup>1</sup> may not be easy to determine. Perhaps all of them do not mean the same thing. In any case, there are too many guns around for a frank expression of views. Moreover, a troubled people soon learn to tell whatever the questioner expects from them, a deviousness that their troubled state teaches them. One thing is however clear, that they have a strong sense of their distinct identity, and '*azaadi*' is an emotive expression of that distinctness, even if in concrete political terms it means different things to different people, or nothing more specific than a yearning for a free existence for many. Everywhere in Kashmir, though more in urban than in rural areas, the response to any talk of '*azaadi*' is spontaneous and enthusiastic, even in the least propitious circumstances.

Most secular-minded persons in India will immediately ask: is this identity religious? One thing can be said without any hesitation: it is certainly not irreligious. If that puts a question mark on our sympathy for that identity, then there is something wrong with our understanding of popular identities. The identity of a people is what they are in their own eyes, the self-image about which they feel strongly, irrespective of how one interprets it in relation to their material existence. And religion is an integral part of what most people are in their own eyes. Islam, the way Kashmiri Muslims believe it and practise it, is very much a part of the identity that they feel so strongly for. If irreligious or non-religious identities alone deserve support, then no national

---

<sup>1</sup>Freedom from oppression; Also used for Independence.

*self-determination* movement can ever be supported, because there is no national identity — at least in the third world — that is totally devoid of a religious dimension. Of course, this raises the question whether such a religious identity can guarantee the security and the cultural freedom of minorities, and what assurances will be given in this regard. The Islam that Kashmiris believe in and practise has in the past been on the whole a syncretic and relatively open system of beliefs and attitudes, which has prevented the Islamic element of the Kashmiri identity from becoming a hindrance to a common Kashmiri identity shared with the Hindus. Communal fanaticism has not been a notable characteristic of the Kashmiri mind. Hopefully, the events of the last six years have not made much difference to this, though embittered émigré *pandits* do say that things have irrevocably changed now. It is perhaps not an insignificant matter that the Sikhs in Kashmir have not left the valley, and do not seem to feel the kind of discomfort that one would expect in the presence of an alien fundamentalism. How much of the *pandits'* views is born of distrust, which no doubt finds evidence in the actions of the Pakistan-backed fundamentalist elements in Kashmir, and how much is a realistic appreciation of actual change in the attitudes of the average Kashmiri Muslim is a matter of doubt. There is certainly plenty of hostility towards India in Kashmir, but little hatred of Hindus as such. And even as regards the hostility towards India, one hears people say with surprising regularity that what they hate is India and not Indians. That they feel impelled to express this clarification is perhaps a tribute to their pride in their tolerant and friendly culture.

But the question whether Kashmiri *self-determination* is religious *self-determination* seeks specifically to know whether the Kashmiri desire to exercise the right of *self-determination* harks back to the two-nation theory: that, being mostly Muslims, they must join Pakistan. Whether such a desire must necessarily be branded communal is a legitimate counter-query. And whether be it communal or not — it is to be met by suppressing the desire of *self-determination* is another legitimate counter-query. There are certainly some in Kashmir who frankly believe in the two-nation theory as a political faith. The *Jamaat-e-Islami* of Kashmir holds the view that as a Muslim majority region, Kashmir must be in Pakistan; and so do most of the other (smaller) Islamic organisations. There are even a few who believe in panIslamism as an ideology. However, it is worth mentioning the views of *People's League* leader Shabir Ahmed Shah, one of the most respected of the *Hurriyat Conference* leaders, a cultured and soft-spoken man who has a rare concern for ethical propriety in politics. He makes a distinction between what he calls religious fundamentalism (hatred or denigration of other religions), which in his view is wrong, and political fundamentalism (by which he means the inseparability of religion and politics), which in his view is not wrong. He has gone out of his way to address the *pandit* refugees in Jammu and ask them to

come back to the valley, for Kashmir in his view is incomplete without them. The question whether he has an answer to all the difficulties that are likely to arise from such a viewpoint need not detain us now. What is instructive is the clear distinction he makes, and the vocal concern for tolerance and amity between Hindus and Muslims that he — like many Kashmiris — is able to combine, not as a matter of political tactics, but of genuine conviction, with his unflinching faith in the only Truth.

But by all accounts, it appears that for what may be called the average Kashmiri Muslim, Islam means the humane and tolerant tradition of the religion as interpreted by the Kashmiri *sufis*, whose influence is symbolised by the *ziarats* that dot the valley, and is as inseparable from the Kashmiri identity as the latter is inseparable from Islam. As a consequence, pan-Islamism or the two-nation theory, it is said, do not attract the Kashmiris much. How true is this opinion? It is interesting that when the Kashmiris are asked whether liberated Kashmir is likely to be a *theocracy* or a *secular democracy*, those who identify with the syncretic and humane tradition answer without hesitation that it will be a *secular democracy*, whereas the fundamentalists reply in evident doubt that 'it is for the people to decide'. A more interesting test of the belief is the ideology being resorted to by the Indian army's surrogates in Kashmir, the sponsored counter-insurgents, all of them criminal gangs, in their bid to attract legitimacy in the valley. Their proclaimed worldview is the synthetic and tolerant culture of what is being called *Kashmiriyat*. They evidently profess this ideology, not to attract the *pandits* who are a minuscule minority, nor Indian public opinion, which is happy with any counter-insurgents, howsoever criminal and howsoever oriented ideologically, but the Kashmiri Muslims. Kuka Parrey alias Jamshed Shirazi, the *Shahenshah* of these army-led criminals, has repeatedly said that his enmity with Pakistan-supported groups such as the *Hizb-ul-Mujahideen* is because they are out to destroy the tolerant and humane traditions of Kashmir. It is not known how honestly he believes all this, for as the *JKLF* leader Yasin Malik points out, this man was a pan-Islamic militant before he turned into an agent of the Indian army, but it is instructive that he professes to do so. It is evidently aimed at the common Kashmiri Muslims, and neither the Indian state nor the *pandits* who are interested only in his guns and not his ideology. And yet, any perceived insult to Islam would enrage the Kashmiris and result in violent popular outbursts, such as were seen twice in the past, in 1963–64 and 1973, much before the rise of militancy.

How does one make sense of all this? Does it mean, somebody will ask in exasperation, that when — and if — it comes to choosing, Kashmiris will not choose Pakistan on grounds of religious affinity? Or that they will? How does one understand their choice if they do? And how if they do not? Progressive-minded people are accustomed to two modes of thought. One, stemming from the Marxist tradition,

which has a framework of interpretation that is said to provide answers to all basic social questions, and a strategy of class struggle that is said to provide solutions to all basic social problems, at least in principle. But the answers and solutions provided by that tradition to questions concerning religious and ethnic identities, and indeed to all problems other than those concerning economic class struggles, have proved extremely inadequate. And the second, more recent tradition, stemming from what is usually called the post-modern worldview (if a view that will not unequivocally endow the world with any greater reality than that of a mental construct can be graced with that title) in which questions do not call for answers, but an interrogation of the question, usually to discover that it really means something else. Neither of these traditions will really help us answer these questions, though the Marxist tradition is at least capable of being revised and reformulated to provide a useful guide to thought. Hopefully, at least in the coming century, radical thought will get over this empty choice between dubious certitudes and the certitude of only doubt, and learn to seek real answers to the real problems of real human existence.

## **WILL KASHMIRIS CHOOSE PAKISTAN?**

In the meanwhile, what about the question we began with: is Kashmiri *self-determination* religious *self-determination*? If it comes to choosing, will they choose Pakistan? It is difficult to know for certain. It is quite possible that if both India and Pakistan honourably guarantee not only the existence but also the peaceful development of Kashmir (for it will be a landlocked country if it comes into being), most Kashmiris will prefer an independent Kashmir. But if that guarantee is not forthcoming, as is quite possible, they may well choose Pakistan, not for reasons only of religious affinity but also because it makes social and economic sense. Kashmir was, prior to partition, linked to the rest of the subcontinent through what is today's Pakistan and not through the Banihal pass. Its commercial and social (not merely religious) links were with today's Pakistan. To travel by road from the Kashmir valley to Pakistan is easy all the year round, whereas to go to India is a tedious journey that leaves you exhausted by the time you reach Jammu, unless you have the money to fly. And that road too is closed for about three months in the year. This '*atut ang*'<sup>2</sup> this inseparable organ of India, is unapproachable from India for a quarter of the calendar year, unless one has the money to fly, and this has been so for the last 50 years for which Kashmir has been a — repeatedly proclaimed — '*atut ang*' of India.

---

<sup>2</sup>Integral part. Used by Indian state while denying the right of Kashmiris their right to self-determination.

Such is the shame we bear. And in these days when the market is everything, when development is allegedly only market-driven, does it not make perfect economic sense to choose the country with which communication links are palpably better, that too when the region, like Kashmir, is dependent upon export of apples, dry fruit and handicrafts, and the import of tourists? At least our World Bank-driven intellectuals and the Manmohan admirers among our newspaper columnists must accept that for Kashmiris the choice of Pakistan is the most rational one.

But suppose that Kashmiris want to choose Pakistan on the religious ground that they feel happy and fully satisfied in their identity if they live with their co-religionists, what exactly is objectionable about it? Communalism, in the sense of a hateful attitude towards people of other religions, is bad (though what one does about it is another matter). But what exactly is wrong about empathy with one's co-religionists if it does not entail hatred or disparagement of other religions? It may be said that religious identities inevitably lead to communal hatred. That the possibility is there cannot be denied, but there is nothing inevitable about it, and anyway the same danger is present with linguistic and ethnic identities. But human beings find it difficult to live without identities. It would certainly be nice if people did not have a tendency to gather together in religious, ethnic, linguistic groupings, and lived happily together in the most disparate groups. That is not easy for human beings, and is never going to be easy, though it is both necessary and possible to mitigate feelings of prejudice and hatred born of disparate identities. But if *self-determination* based upon language or ethnicity is not regarded as bad so long as it is not driven by sectarian hatred of others and makes territorial sense, why should not religious *self-determination* be acceptable on the same footing? One hopes somebody will give some answer other than that Lenin or Stalin said this or that about 'the nationality question'.

*Realpolitik*, of course, has an answer, which many (Hindu) leftists in India will not feel ashamed to echo. With the Taliban capturing Kabul and the mullahs of Teheran closing in on deviant women, the danger of Islamic fundamentalism becomes a convenient argument for India and Indians to deny freedom to the Kashmiris. Even if the Kashmiri Muslims are themselves not communal, it will be said, the successful secession of Kashmir will strengthen — if only in spirit — the forces of Muslim fundamentalism, which it is everybody's duty in today's world to thwart. Poor Kashmiris, therefore, will have to be sacrificed for the noble cause of what we call 'secularism' and what the US calls 'democracy'. But whether anybody likes it or not, and whether the Kashmiris are sacrificed or not, there is a good likelihood that the first half of the next century will belong to Islamic fundamentalism the way the first half of this century belonged to socialist dogmatism. The reign of Islam will in all likelihood get into a crisis faster than that of Marxism-Leninism, for the wisdom of the *mulla* backed by

the gun of the *mujahid* has far, far fewer answers to the problems of modern human existence than the formulas of Marxism-Leninism. And then, perhaps — unless some new dogma comes up in the meanwhile, which cannot be ruled out, given the human hunger for absolutes — we can all sit down to think out a viable (that is to say, humanly possible) alternative to the mode of life imposed by this monstrosity called corporate capitalism, *sans* dogmatic and utopian assumptions about absolutely and exclusively true ideas, endlessly perfectible human beings and paradisaical human relations. Why should poor Kashmiris lose in the meanwhile?

Let us get back to two questions raised earlier, and try to discuss them, for they are of importance to progressive theory and practice. One is that Kashmir has seen a very determined militant struggle for ‘*azaadi*’ for more than six years with widespread mass support and even sporadic mass participation. And yet nobody is able to say with certainty what exactly the Kashmiris mean when they talk of ‘*azaadi*’. Why is this so? The second is that, assuming that all that has been said above about the Kashmiri ethos is wrong, and that the Kashmiris are driven by rabid fundamentalist hatred of secular/Hindu India to raise the demand for *self-determination*, as embittered *émigré* *pandits* say, is the denial of that right in the name of refusing to acknowledge the legitimacy of communalism a justifiable attitude, as many ‘leftists’ in India seem to think?

## ASSESSING ‘WHAT PEOPLE THINK’

The first question is pertinent to many more contexts than just Kashmir. How does one gauge ‘what the people really think’ in the presence of arms? Armed rebellions are raging all over the world, including India. All of them claim to speak in the name of some oppressed section of the people. It is certainly true that there can be no armed upsurge without some degree of support from the people in whose name it speaks. But how deep is the support? To what extent does the rebellion really represent “the people’s interests” as it claims? How does one get behind the bullets and assess what the alleged real protagonists think about the whole thing?

There is no easy answer to this question, but today it is — and is going to be for a long time to come — a vital question for a democratic attitude towards politics. For *armed politics* has come to stay. More and more, dissenting politics in the world tends to take to arms, and that creates the problem of understanding what exactly the politics represents. Till now weapons have been seen by radical intellectuals in terms of their efficacy in realising the cherished goal of ‘*liberation*’, the one-point terminus of much radical thought. The fact that most intellectuals are struck simultaneously by mortal



fear and romantic awe of weapons has made a closer look at *armed politics* difficult. If we are able to get over the infatuation with the terminal notion of *liberation* and learn to see progress as a (real, but) much more imperfect and wobbly process, staggered in time and liable to regression, whose ideal summation may be called *liberation* to satisfy the common human urge for perfection in ideas, then it becomes easy to see *armed politics* for what it is: a form of politics. And as a form of politics it is liable to be questioned for its democratic content and not just the 'liberative' potential of its aims. What exactly is its relation with the people it claims to represent? How much freedom does it allow those people to direct its activity? What are the mechanisms it has created to ensure that those people can effectively hold it answerable to them? These are today important questions for a democratic understanding of political movements, for the era of peaceful mass movements is rapidly giving way to the era of the rebel's gun, for a variety of reasons, some understandable in the sense that the choice is evidently ineluctable, and some certainly not.

Such questions would not pose a major problem in the case of unarmed movements. When a Medha Patkar or a Sharad Joshi claims to speak on behalf of the evacuees of the Narmada dam or the farmers of Maharashtra, the truth or falsity of the claim is tested easily enough. The people in whose name they claim to speak have no reason to support them or to keep silent if they do not agree with them, and the disagreement will soon be evident. It is different with *armed politics*. As Abdul Gani, the voluble professor of the Persian language who officiates as the spokesperson of Kashmir's *All-Party Hurriyat Conference* likes to say, "when the guns speak, politics becomes silent". More precisely, the politics of those who carry the gun may or may not become silent, but the people in whose name the gun speaks gradually withdraw into silence. It is partly due to the fear of getting caught (literally and figuratively) in the crossfire, if one draws attention to oneself by talking too much; more particularly, there is the fear of being branded an 'agent' of the other party, by either party. To add to this there is the rather tricky fact (from the point of assessing 'what the people really want') of the very human tendency to find oneself in agreement with those who have power in their hands. All authority thrives upon this weakness, whether it is the authority of the state or the authority of the rebel's gun. When one views authority in this role as an ideology, as something that commands obedience not by virtue of its truth but by virtue of its power, it should be realised that the ideological trait is based upon this very human weakness. (All ideology, incidentally, draws sustenance from some weakness in the human subject, whether individual or collective, whether purely psychological or social-psychological, a fact that is of far-reaching consequence for rethinking radical theories of human existence and progress.) Armed rebellions, therefore, frequently give the impression of greater public acquiescence in their ideas and deeds than would

be the case if they were unarmed. It may be asked: how does one judge this when — or to the extent that — the acquiescence is willing and conscious? The argument here is certainly not that there is something that the people ‘really’ believe in as against what they think they believe. Any such notion can be quite fascist. But the ideology of power that induces acquiescence reveals its presence when its authority takes a beating — as when the armed rebels are driven back — and the people find themselves (it is not the case that this always happens) doubting their past acquiescence. One is then left wondering what exactly the ideas acquiesced in represented when they were apparently widely accepted.

In this situation, to know what the people want, or to ensure that what they want alone is expressed in their name, is not easy. The former is a problem for analysis, but the latter is a problem as well for democratic politics, the problem of ensuring the accountability of ‘people’s movements’ to the people. It is of course true that ‘what the people think’ is not a stable thing. It changes as their perception of their strength changes. The fact that there is an armed — and therefore powerful — force functioning on their behalf may well affect their perception of what they want. Such a genuine perception of their strength must be distinguished from the ideology of the gun referred to earlier. The distinction is revealed, as said above, when the gun takes a beating, but not before. The problem is that there is no way of knowing the exact extent to which the silent or vocal assent of the people is an indication of the perception of their strength, and not any of the reasons enumerated earlier. But the fact that what the people want is not a static nor an easily determinable thing, is certainly no excuse for allowing anybody with effective weapon power to claim that their power entitles them to represent the people’s aspirations before the world, and to pass off all their deeds as the deeds of the people, taking advantage of the silence that follows *armed politics*. Practitioners of *armed politics* frequently resort to such claims, with the added prestige of *liberators* or *mujahids* to back them. But their accountability to the people is not something one can leave to their *self-discipline*, reposing confidence in their commitment as ‘*liberators*’ of the ‘masses’. Nobody can be trusted so far with power. It is, and must be, a matter of public concern, a matter of concern for the democratic intelligentsia and the human rights movement, which must learn, in these days of *armed politics*, to be more concerned with the democratic content of political forms of rebel movements than the millennium their weapons promise to bring about. In Kashmir, for instance, one frequently hears the opinion that the outlook of the Kashmiris is more truly represented by the worldview of the militarily badly weakened *Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF)* than that of the heavily armed Pakistan-backed *Hizb-ul-Mujahideen* whose ideologues in the *All Party Hurriyat Conference* speak confidently in the name of the Kashmiris. If this is true, such

a tragic anomaly must itself be as much a matter of concern to democratic-minded analysts and human rights activists as the denial of Kashmiri aspirations by the Indian state. And now we have tragedy turning into farce with the thoroughly unpopular India-backed counter-insurgent gangs claiming from within the bunkers of the *Border Security Force* that it is they who represent the true voice of the Kashmiris.

## FREEDOM AND EVIL

Let us turn to the second question: assuming that a people wish to exercise the right of *self-determination* on purely communal grounds, is that right then to be denied to them in the interests of 'progress' and 'democracy'? Here the question is not whether freedom is an absolute thing; nothing in this world is or can be absolute. That much the history of the 20th century, the century of grotesque absolutes, teaches us. But the question is: what is the relation between freedom and evil? Is freedom a thing to be necessarily suppressed in order to forestall evil? Or does freedom perhaps have a positive role in overcoming evil? This is a difficult question, but it is likely to be posed again and again as fundamentalism of religious and ethnic varieties sweeps across the world. Progressive-minded persons are likely to be caught on the same side as dictators unless some serious thought is given to the matter.

What is the nature of evil in human social consciousness and behaviour? By evil, we here mean oppressive, hateful and other similar traits that set people one against the other. We are not here asking this question with reference to the actions and ideas of those whose position in the social structure implies and requires such evil. We are asking this about the acceptance of and participation in such evil by others, without which it cannot sustain itself. And about other situations where one cannot point to any dominant vested interests that are served by the evil. Why is it that not only those who have a vested interest in perpetuating a particular form of evil but even the 'common people', as they are usually called, become accomplices in it? And are they always only accomplices and never the originators of evil? In particular, what prevents people from overcoming divisive and hate-filled fundamentalism and reaching out to their fellow-creatures in friendship and love, which obviously benefits everyone excepting only those who profit by dividing the people? Why do people who gain nothing materially from it succumb to it?

All the answers that radical theories have are centred on the externality of the sources of evil in popular consciousness. Evil in people's minds is a consequence of successful hegemonic devices put in motion by the oppressors and internalised by the masses because of the pressures of oppression and deprivation; or else it is

a skewed perception of reality caused by conditions of oppression and privation. A more sophisticated explanation is that the presence of multiple hierarchies at all levels of society makes possible the reproduction, at all levels, of the divisive and oppressive ideology of power, which basically serves the interests of the ruling classes.

These explanations contain enough truth to make them seem sufficient to those who do not wish to face more uncomfortable questions. The hegemonic efforts, the people's privations and the multiple hierarchies are all equally external to people's consciousness. They act upon it from outside and corrupt it from outside, which is a comforting idea to hold. But in truth, the human mind is not just an empty receptacle that receives the hegemonic ideas of the rulers, nor a bad reflector that somehow converts its sufferings into hatred for the wrong party taking the cue from the motivated codes built into the ruling culture, nor a copying machine that reproduces in thought the ideology of power that stems from the omnipresent structures of dominance. Even if an idea has its roots in hegemonic manipulation or other external conditions, it becomes possible only if there is something it can catch on to in the structure of the recipients' consciousness. We do not take in ideas from outside. Ideas (including ideology, which is often supposed to originate in the interests of others) are shaped in the process of making sense of our existence in the course of interaction with external reality, a process that involves on the side of the subject the whole of the human personality, which is a dynamically shaped product of the interaction between the complex human psychic structure and external conditions and influences. Unless this edifice of our psychic structure and the process of formation of the personality and of consciousness provide scope for certain patterns of belief and response, attachment to the ideas (or ideology) is not possible, whatever be the external interests they serve, or the external conditions they originate in, if any. It is not enough, therefore, to have a theory of the material basis — or rather, more properly, the external conditions — of evil in human consciousness and behaviour. It is necessary also to have a theory of its human basis. It is not enough to analyse the external interests served by the evil, or the external conditions that underlie it; nor merely to devise strategies for getting rid of them. It is necessary also to understand the internal potential for complicity with such evil in the structure of the human personality, and the moral conditions in which it can be overcome, or at least subdued. Radical theories have shaped plenty of theoretical tools for looking critically at the structures and processes of oppression, but when it comes to looking critically at the oppressed, the only theoretical tool available is the notion of ideology, whether it originates in the hegemonic manipulations of the rulers, or the privation of the oppressed, or the omnipresent multiplicity of the structures of oppression, or some combination of these.

This very basic gap in radical theory can easily lead to an abdication of the re-

sponsibility of theoretical effort, in the name of eschewing 'totalising' thought. If by 'totalising' thought is meant any effort to lay down a finite set of interpretative principles that will explain 'everything', it is certainly to be eschewed. That is impossible, and the dogmatic belief that it is possible will in all likelihood lead to *totalitarian politics*. But the world is an interconnected totality, whether one likes it or not, and it is the responsibility of theory to make as much sense of it as is realistically possible, if any real progress is to be achieved in human affairs. That attempt must not be called 'totalising' in the pejorative sense. To take in the world only as unconnected bits and pieces is to give up the responsibility of thinking theoretically about progress.

It is not proposed to make any attempt here to fill up this theoretical gap, but if it is clear that the human complicity with or capacity for social evil has roots within, as much as the evil may have roots without, it should also be clear that a *self-critical* attitude is necessary if evil is to be overcome. A merely critical attitude towards the external conditions of existence is not sufficient. And freedom is an essential precondition for a *self-critical* attitude towards one's inner potential for the bad. Only a free people will be *self-critical*. In particular, an unfree people, shackled in the name of their attachment to evil, will never look at the inner roots of their attachment to it, but will use their unfreedom to make a virtue of it. Freedom is a necessary precondition for *self-criticism*, though it runs the risk (which will immediately be pointed out) that it does not always guarantee it. It is because evil in the consciousness of people is always seen to have roots exclusively without, that progressive-minded persons are attracted to the seemingly sensible idea that the best way to exorcise evil is to build walls that will keep it away, restrict the freedom to make recourse to it, and work to alter, the material conditions that have given rise to it. Or perhaps the reasoning is more cynical: that people, if they are allowed the freedom, will be fatally attracted by evil, and so the only way to prevent their degeneration is to shackle them until the Utopian millennium in which everybody is an angel descends upon the earth. But on the contrary, the freedom to critically overcome one's capacity for and complicity with evil (oppressive and hateful values and structures that set one human being above or against another) can be a positive aid to the process by which human beings will attain whatever perfection is possible for them. If complicity with hateful and oppressive ideas is seen to be not something imposed from outside, but as something that grows in the process of interaction between the inside and the outside, then we will realise that freedom and the responsibility that freedom brings with it will alone make possible the *self-critical* attitude necessary to overcome it. In general, human beings need to fight not only existing structures of oppression, but also their capacity to produce oppressive structures again and again. Not only the oppressive conditions of life, but also their own complicity in the oppression of each other. To deprive them of freedom

is to deprive them of the precondition for a responsible attitude towards what they are and what they do.

All this is not meant to set up freedom as one more panacea to replace other curealls, but only to point out that in the difficult task of transformation of human existence, freedom is not just a glorious end that is to be realised at the last (which in practice means that it is indefinitely postponed), but is also an instrument that aids the process. The necessity of freedom to fight oppression is of course well recognised, but the necessity of freedom for the fight against oneself too needs to be recognised. What is usually called social transformation is also simultaneously human transformation, which is partly at least human self-transformation, and freedom is a necessary condition for it. This still leaves out a lot of problems and does not answer the difficult question; what exactly is the point at which the freedom of action of religious and ethnic fundamentalists should cease in the interests of human civilisation, but at least it will serve to provide an understanding that will distinguish progressive-minded people from dictators when both of them claim to worry equally about the misuse of freedom by fundamentalists.

## INDIAN STATE'S 'GAME PLAN'

We can turn at the end to less controversial matters, which are yet matters that have not attracted sufficient response. This is what the Indian state is doing in Kashmir in its effort to bring the Kashmiris to their knees (or their 'senses', as our newspapers say euphemistically). Many will already put this in the past tense, perhaps. By hook or crook Kashmiris, it is already being said, have been subdued and 'brought to their senses'. The swearing in of the Farooq Abdullah government is seen as the turning point.

What will happen in the future cannot be said with certainty. The insurgency will no doubt go on for a long time. Comparisons with Punjab are self-deluding, for the feeling for '*azaadi*' is much deeper in Kashmir. The continuance of the insurgency will no doubt be blamed on Pakistan by most Indians, and certainly by our rulers. Pakistan's interest in keeping Kashmir burning is no secret. Its interest is without doubt as *mala fide* as is India's interest in Kashmir: territory, security, national ego, and everything else except what the Kashmiris desire. But if and to the extent that insurgency keeps raging, the main reason is going to be not Pakistan, but the Kashmiris themselves. The statement repeatedly made by India's politicians and columnists, that the Kashmiris are tired of militancy, is a half-truth. They are sick of the endless sacrifice of lives and blood. They are sick of the seemingly hopeless situation in which

they are caught. They are convinced that they are only pawns in a larger battle being fought by the world of Nation States, in which their desire has the least priority for everyone. They had hoped that either Pakistan or the west or the UN would help them achieve their goal: the simple opportunity to decide how they would like to live. But now they are convinced that all these powers are interested in something else. They were half hoping that India, which always speaks in terms of the values of 'justice' and 'equality', would not be able to stand up to the pressure of the sheer logic of their case and the justice of their arguments. But now they know that India has very brutal answers in its arsenal to all their pleas of justice, and all the impeccable logic of their arguments. Kashmiris may be sick of militancy, but they are much more sick of this betrayal, betrayal of principles by India and betrayal of faith by the other countries. And what they are not sick of is their hope to be free some day.

What we, as Indians, should be engaged in is not the familiar amoral game of political stargazing: what Pakistan will do, what the US will not do, what Farooq Abdullah will achieve, and what New Delhi will not allow to be achieved, etc. We should be more properly concerned with the brutal way in which the present state of affairs has been brought about in Kashmir, if we are, that is, concerned about democracy and democratic values as our first priority, and are principled enough not to hedge our concern with tactical 'realism', or the kind of opportunism that calls in its aid considerations of 'larger historical issues' or 'the global political context'.

Very brutal suppression, of course, is the answer, and there is no need to recount the numerous instances of fake 'cross-fire' killings or mass massacres of the people by India's 'brave' *jawans*<sup>3</sup>. But what needs to be explicitly mentioned is the latest and the most cynically efficacious means employed by the Indian state in Kashmir, as part of its 'game plan' (a Kashmiri Congressman's words) to get through with the elections and install an administration of Kashmiris in Srinagar, to show the world that 'normalcy' has returned to the valley. The replacement of General Krishna Rao's administration by an elected Kashmiri government was to be made possible by the augmentation of India's armed forces by armed Kashmiri surrogates: not a statutorily established force of Kashmiri policemen, but unlawful gangs of armed Kashmiri youth, sheltered in or around the ubiquitous bunkers of the armed forces, doing their job of abduction, torture and killing, but only more efficaciously, more knowledgeably and more anonymously, and looting and raping Kashmir withal. Unlike the armed forces, which stay — and need to stay — separate from the local society, and operate in unwieldy and visible groups, these local substitutes can (ideally) live within the local society and act as anonymous individuals. The ideal, of course, is spoilt somewhat

---

<sup>3</sup>An infantryman; a soldier.

by the fact that when they are, as in Kashmir, almost unanimously detested by the public — even by many men of the Congress and National Conference — they cannot live and operate too far away from their uniformed protectors, but nevertheless the advantage of operating through unlicensed local gangs is not slight. More than the physical and logistic advantage is the moral advantage: if Kashmiris kill Kashmiris, some in favour of Pakistan and some in favour of India, then what can poor General Krishna Rao's administration do? Or the army bosses in Srinagar's Badamibagh, for that matter? But what they should not be doing, and are evidently only too plainly doing, is to protect, arm and patronise one gang against another, and openly abet their crimes in the "interests" of the Indian state and its strategy of not allowing the cession of the prized '*atut ang*' at any cost. Nobody in Kashmir makes a secret of the fact that it is this 'game plan' that has made possible the terrorisation of Kashmiri society to an extent sufficient to sap the resolve of the Kashmiris and hold elections successfully.

"This Kuka Parrey's gang are of course a bunch of criminals, but you just watch, it is they who will make elections possible in the valley": this gleeful comment of an understandably bitter *pandit* on his occasional visit from Jammu back to his half blown-up home in Srinagar, just before parliament polls, is plain truth. One of the gang leaders, a colourful character called Papa Kishtwari alias Ghulam Mohammed Lone, put it with embarrassing innocence when he said to a visiting human rights activist that "it is my gun that will make democracy possible in Kashmir".

To privatise insurgency by introducing protected surrogate criminal gangs is of course not an idea invented by India's home ministry. 'It is done everywhere', Indians are quick to explain in justification, and usually add (as if they have discovered the piece of wisdom) that 'all is fair in war'. Even some Kashmiris, the kind who are fair even to the enemy, say the same thing, though in tones of frustration and not glee: 'It is done everywhere, and we cannot blame India alone'. Of course, it is done everywhere. But presumably, we wish that it should not be done anywhere. If it is unpardonable to militarise a society in the name of tackling an insurgency, then it is unpardonable a hundred-fold to criminalise it.

But a criticism of the rulers that is not accompanied by *self-criticism* of the rebels is of no use. Where the rebels are not prepared for *self-criticism*, the criticism will have to come from outside. It is no secret that the Indian Army's *Rashtriya Rifles*, the counter-insurgency wing that is described by Ghulam Mohammed Magami, the Congress MP from Srinagar, as a "gang of ruffians", which is the premier agency for the recruitment of the Kashmiri counter-insurgent gangs, has found sufficient material to work on precisely because of the methods of operation adopted by the militant groups, and the problems stemming therefrom. The recruits are almost all criminalised former militants of the various groups, or victims or kith and kin of victims of the vengeful



acts of violence indulged in by the militant groups. Quite a few are gangs of former militants who have turned to the Indian army for protection, having lost out to a rival group in violent battles for supremacy. It is unlikely that Kashmiris are unaware of the roots that counter-insurgent criminality has in the very methods of operation adopted by the *mujaheddin*. But it is part of the silence that accompanies weapons — added perhaps to a misplaced loyalty that does not allow public criticism of the *liberators* — that nobody in Kashmir is willing to locate these uncomfortable sources. The *Hurriyat Conference* leaders, otherwise intelligent and rational men, maintain stonily that all the recruits to what in Kashmir are called the *renegade gangs* were Intelligence *plants* within the militant movement from the very beginning, and there is therefore no question of criminalisation of militancy to be addressed when complaining about the criminalisation of the state's counter-insurgency strategies. This is, of course, a hopeless abdication of the responsibility to think self-critically.

But then that brings us to the responsibility of Indians, at least those who claim to speak on behalf of humanity and justice, to think self-critically about our own silence in the face of the government criminality. Forgetting for the moment what is the proper democratic attitude towards the Kashmir issue, the counter-insurgency tactics being adopted by India's rulers should, as a matter of principle, cause serious disquiet. Physical suppression supplemented by manipulation with the help of local opportunists has always been the government of India's only response to the militant separatist struggles in the border states, but the tactics of sponsoring private pro-India gangs of armed local youth is something qualitatively worse. It creates an atmosphere of terror that is palpably more intense than that induced by state lawlessness. The Indian government has been doing this systematically for the past few years in all the border states. In the north-east it has made use of ethnic divisions to evil effect. That the insurgents of the north-east have frequently provided scope for this is a different matter. Everywhere the state has dangled the temptation of safe crime to attract local youth to its counter-insurgency tactics. And there is enough criminality in any human society for these wretched tactics to succeed. The state's pact with them is that so long as they do the required job of attacking the partisans of secession — armed or unarmed — the *gun-wielding militants* or the *intelligentsia*, or even *human rights activists* such as the late Parag Kumar Das of Assam or Jalil Ahmed Andrabi of Kashmir, they are free to indulge in rape, loot and extortion for their private profit. They can wreak vengeance on their personal enemies, maim them or kill them. It does not require much imagination to realise that such state-sponsored armed gangs can soon degenerate into warlords above and beyond the reach of the law. There cannot be a more vicious abuse of the basic norms of lawful governance than this wanton criminalisation of society. To do this to a people merely because they have asked for

the right to leave this country is an act of base cruelty. Suppression by the military is a palpable degree less vicious. It injures the people physically but does not destroy the ethical integrity of their society. Small wonder that sensitive Kashmiris declare now that they hate India much more today than they ever did in the past, even in the past six years of reckless violence of the Indian armed forces.

Will all of us speak up at least now and protect a basic principle of democratic governance from further degeneration? Or are we content to let the Kashmiris, Nagas and other people similarly situated hate us for what our rulers have done and are doing to them, satisfied that in the interests of 'secularism' and opposition to US hegemony, their dreams of what they call freedom and what we call secession are being effectively contained?